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Gothic Jewelry: Sinister Pleasures

Guest Curator: Valerie Steele

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Left: Pin by Glenda Arentzen. Red gold, yellow gold, and fancy diamonds, 1995.
Patek Philippe 'Top Hat' 18K red gold, circa 1955.
Red gold and diamond Infinity earrings and ring by Angela Hubel, 2012.
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Curated Exhibition in Print 2012

GUEST CURATOR: VALERIE STEELE

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Raspberry, 2011
epoxy resin, brass, crystal
3 ¾ x 7 x 4 ¾"
PHOTO: JOJI KOJIMA
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FOREWORD

AS OUR GUEST curator, Valerie Steele, conveys in this *Exhibition in Print*, "Gothic" has assumed many different meanings over the centuries. "The term, which derives from the Goths and Visigoths of antiquity, was first applied to the art and architecture of medieval Europe," writes Steele, and "then to the Victorian era's Gothic Revival, and now generally to literary and cinematic genres that glorify the allure of mystery, terror, and the supernatural." Her selection for this special issue on gothic jewelry reveals how the provocative and well-wrought works of contemporary metalsmiths are effectively extending the associations of this term.

During the late Middle Ages, Gothic style architecture was characterized by a quest for lightness and verticality—achieved through flying buttresses, pointed arches, and stained glass windows—all intended to bring worshippers closer to God. Much Gothic jewelry of the 12th through 14th centuries was worn to signify social status, as found in seal rings and chains of rank, while the prevailing culture of chivalry spawned jewelry that served more sentimental and devotional ends.

Only a few of the jewelers featured in these pages reference Gothic architectural elements in their creations, and fewer still display concern with archaic chivalrous codes. Although sentiment does infuse some of their pieces, most present-day designers seem intent on plumbing the darker depths of the gothic imagination, dwelling in the domains of mortality, cruelty, alchemy, pain, weaponry, desire and mystery. Steele has organized her exhibition around such themes, as she takes readers on a seductive and shadowy journey, akin to a stroll through a haunted castle or chamber of horrors.

Each jeweler chosen for this issue contributes a nuanced twist to the notion of Gothic. Each also testifies to the enduring pull all things Gothic continues to exert on the heart and mind. And as Steele herself affirms, it is appropriate that these mortally complex thoughts and concerns are played out against the human body, in the form of elaborate wearable ornament.

SUZANNE RAMLJAK
EDITOR

The mission of *Metalsmith* magazine is to document, analyze, and promote excellence in jewelry and metalsmithing. In fulfillment of the goal of producing a significant document of the field, editorial content will emphasize contemporary activities and ideas, with supportive content to include relevant historical work and critical issues.

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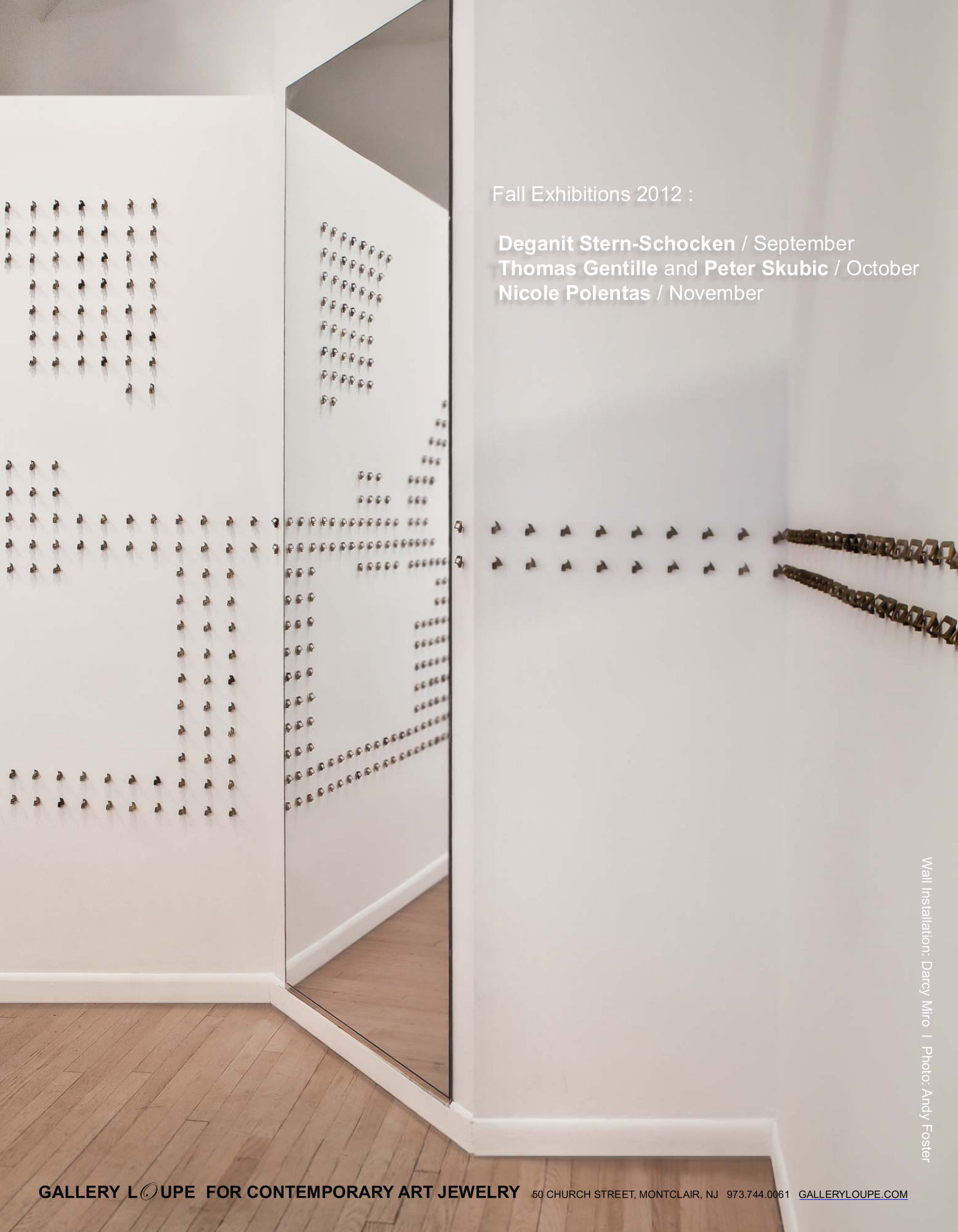

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Gothic Jewelry: Sinister Pleasures

BY VALERIE STEELE

"Gothic" is a strange epithet with a layered history, evoking images of death, destruction, and decay, the power of horror and the erotic macabre. The term, which derives from the Goths and Visigoths of antiquity, was first applied to the art and architecture of medieval Europe, then to the Victorian era's Gothic Revival, and now generally to literary and cinematic genres that glorify the allure of mystery, terror, and the supernatural. This preoccupation with the dark side persists today in goth subculture, gothic rock and heavy metal, and the so-called "New Gothic Art."

In 2008, my colleagues and I at The Museum at FIT organized *Gothic: Dark Glamour*, an exhibition that focused on gothic themes in fashion. We featured the work of designers such as Rick Owens and Alexander McQueen, along with clothing worn by members of the goth subculture. Simon Costin, a multi-faceted English artist, served as art director for the exhibition, helping to create a *mise-en-scène* suggestive of paradigmatic gothic settings: the ruined castle, the graveyard, the laboratory and so forth. The exhibition also included sections devoted to the Victorian cult of mourning, to the vampire, and a cabinet of curiosities displaying a skull with examples of antique mourning jewelry, juxtaposed with contemporary gothic pieces by jewelers such as Shaun Leane.

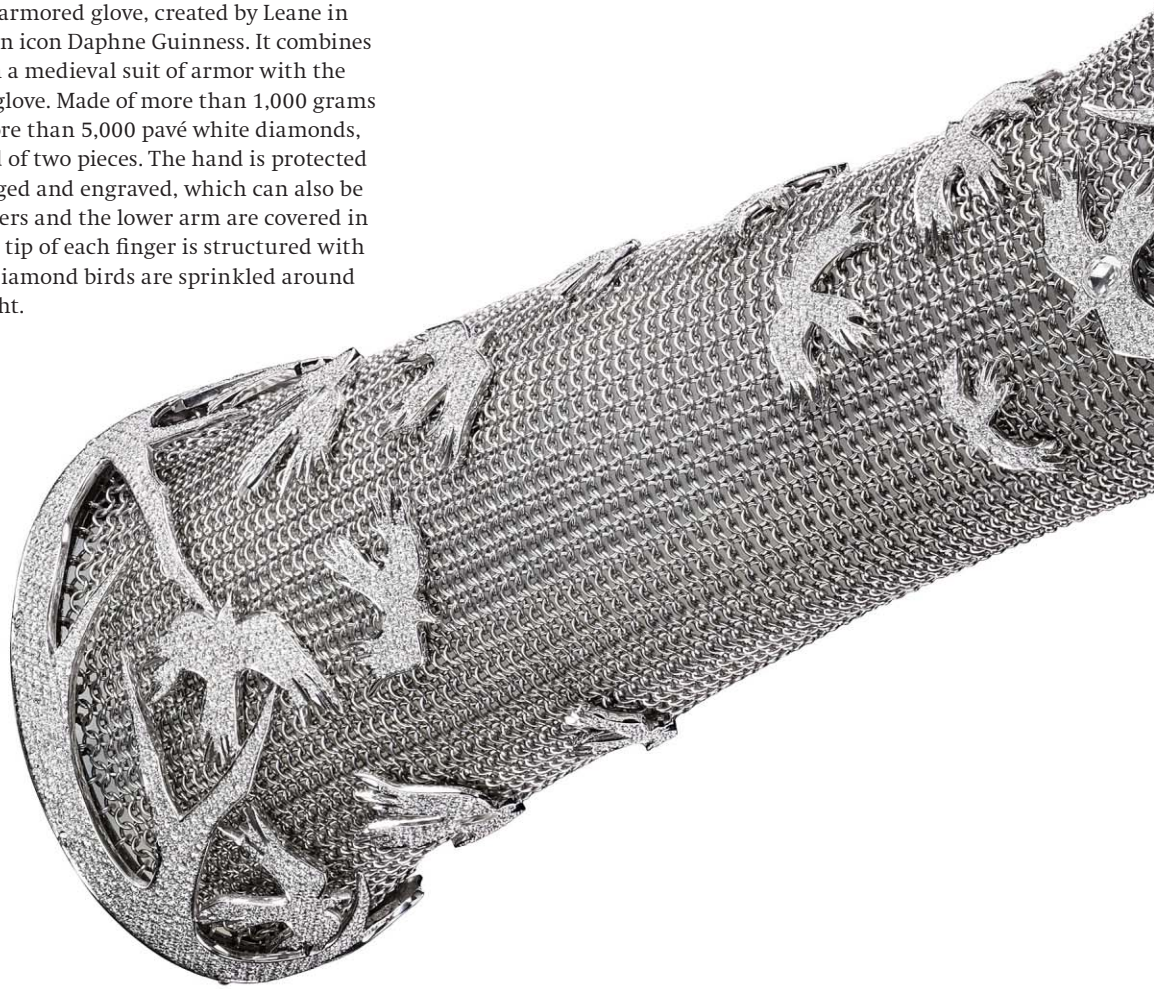
When Suzanne Ramljak invited me to curate an "Exhibition in Print" for *Metalsmith*, I immediately decided to pursue the subject of gothic jewelry. The magazine published a call for related work, while I reached out to artists and jewelers whose jewelry I admired. Eventually, twenty artists were chosen, who together address a wide range of ideas and imagery: alchemy and armor; taxidermy and transience, including blood, bone, and body parts; mourning and memory; razors and reliquaries; and, of course, skulls and skeletons. Although the artists drew on many different associations, the theme of the gothic invariably provoked a sense of embodiment that made it especially appropriate for an exhibition on jewelry.

Installation view of "Gothic: Dark Glamour" exhibition at Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, September 5, 2008–February 21, 2009.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM AT THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Body Armor: Chic & Cruel

One of the most important and influential artists working in the gothic genre is Shaun Leane. Trained as a goldsmith, Leane began his longstanding collaboration with the iconoclastic fashion designer Alexander McQueen in 1992, and over the years he continually pushed the boundaries of catwalk fashion jewelry. "When Leane started making pieces for Alexander McQueen, I was startled by their stylishly implied sadism," recalls celebrated art director and set designer Simon Costin. "The sharp spikes and razor thin blades all spoke of something a 20th-century vampire might wear. They were sexy and cruel at the same time."

Leane held his first solo exhibition, "Violently Elegant," in London in 1997. Drawing on the imagery of piercing, bondage, and other forms of body modification, his pieces often appeared less like jewelry, per se, than as body sculpture or armor, fusing the fleshly and the metallic. This is certainly true of *Contra Mundum (Against the World),* an extraordinary white gold and diamond armored glove, created by Leane in collaboration with fashion icon Daphne Guinness. It combines structural elements from a medieval suit of armor with the aesthetics of an evening glove. Made of more than 1,000 grams of white gold set with more than 5,000 pavé white diamonds, the gauntlet is comprised of two pieces. The hand is protected by a metal cuff, hand-forged and engraved, which can also be worn separately. The fingers and the lower arm are covered in chain mail, although the tip of each finger is structured with a claw-like curved nail. Diamond birds are sprinkled around the arm piece as if in flight.



SHAUN LEANE AND
DAPHNE GUINNESS
Contra Mundum (glove), 2011
18k white gold, diamonds

SHAUN LEANE
Eagle Claw Bracelet, 2008
silver
1 ⅜ x 6 ⅞"

For connoisseurs of the gothic, *Contra Mundum* immediately evokes the origins of Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, a supernatural tale of incest and insanity set in the Middle Ages. Widely regarded as the first gothic novel, it was inspired by the author's dream of a hand in armor on the banister of a great staircase. "I have always loved armor," says Daphne Guinness. "I think it's very beautiful to be able to cover yourself in metal.... But it's also protection." The notion of Guinness bedecked as a medieval knight prompted her friend, Tom Ford, to joke, "I wouldn't be surprised if one day, Daphne was buried in a diamond suit of armor." Guinness herself echoed this image of violent, even deathly, glamour, saying, "When I started making the metal gauntlet with Shaun, I told him I wanted to look like I'd been in a very chic road wreck."

In addition to *Contra Mundum*, Leane is represented by two additional works within this printed exhibition: *Thorned Heart Poison Ring* and *Eagle Claw Bracelet.* Thorns, claws, tusks, and sabers are among his most iconic design elements. Not only are they stabbing devices, many are also animal parts—in this case, replicated in metal. Leane has also created a number of poison rings, symbol of murder under the guise of beauty and pleasure. The image of a heart pierced with thorns—sacred in Christian iconography—becomes in his hands an evocation of the central theme in the gothic sensibility: eroticism laced with pain and violence.

SHAUN LEANE
Thorned Heart Poison Ring
(with secret compartment), 2005
18k white gold, rubies
¾ x 1"

Gothic Architecture

"Gothic" was originally a pejorative term, implying barbarism, as contrasted to the classicism of Western civilization. During the eighteenth century, or Age of Enlightenment, the art and architecture of the Middle Ages were often disparaged as barbaric remnants of feudalism and superstition. As tastes changed, however, the nineteenth century's Gothic Revival became associated with the birth of Romanticism, and the Neo-Gothic style in architecture and the decorative arts tended to acquire more positive, often spiritual, even nostalgic, connotations. Few artists seem to have been directly inspired by the original Goths, although the popularity of Celtic motifs in gothic jewelry seems to allude indirectly to the indigenous "barbarian" cultures of northern Europe. By contrast, many jewelers have been inspired by medieval art and architecture.

"I've always been captivated by Gothic architecture," says artist Diane Falkenhagen. "I'm especially drawn to the characteristic arches, über-decorative ceilings and jewel-like details. The transcendent nature and sheer majesty associated with high Gothic style adds an emotional element to the aesthetic experience." In *Gothic Revival Brooch (The Sublime and the Beautiful)*, she has tried to integrate these feelings with her ongoing artistic practice of incorporating imagery into jewelry objects. Falkenhagen describes the piece as a transformation of "two-dimensional pictorial imagery from Caspar David Friedrich's nineteenth-century gothic revival painting *Cloister Cemetery in the Snow* into a three-dimensional sculptural jewelry form reminiscent of a gothic structure with pointed arches and ribbed vaults."

DIANE FALKENHAGEN
Gothic Revival Brooch (The Sublime and the Beautiful), 2012
mixed-media image, sterling silver, 24k gold plate, brass, stainless steel
2 ½ x 3 ½ x 1 ⅛"
PHOTO: BILL POGUE

Alchemy & Apocalypse

BUT THE GOTHIC also has another genealogy, originating, not in art and architecture, but in the lurid, eighteenth-century literature of terror, which typically portrayed the Middle Ages in terms of witch burnings, sacred relics, and dances of death. Such works spawned a literary (and later also a cinematic) genre of supernatural horror exemplified by the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Bram Stoker, who in turn inspired the goth subculture and goth music.

Alchemy was the focus of considerable attention during the Middle Ages, although the practice was controversial and alchemists were always liable to incur accusations of sorcery. Operating on the borderline between the study of chemistry and the practice of magic, alchemy had the goal of transmuting one substance into another, ideally base metal into gold. Wayne Werner, a metalsmith from Baltimore whose clients include David Bowie, has created a number of works relating to alchemy. *Carbon Pod* is "based on the idea of a chrysalis, or pod form, as a transformative space." A helix wraps around a piece of carbon set with a diamond, while a pearl represents rebirth, a "common theme in the alchemical text concerning the purification of base matter," explains Werner. "Or, as Johnny Cash would say, 'I'm just an old lump of coal, but I'll be a diamond one day.'"

WAYNE WERNER
Carbon Pod, 2008
carbon, diamond, black pearl, 18k and 14k yellow gold
2 ¼ x ½ x ½"
PHOTO: RALPH GABRINER

Medieval religion was often apocalyptic. Dauvit Alexander of The Justified Sinner is a self-taught jeweler, who explains the several ways in which his work could be considered gothic: 1) by directly referencing the Middle Ages, as with his Mace Pendant, which harks back to the medieval weaponry; 2) by referencing the period which has become known as "Victorian Gothic," as with a collar derived from Berlin iron jewelry; 3) by referencing "Gothic Literature," as with a ceremonial chain inspired by Mervyn Peake's novels; 4) by referencing "Gothic Music," as with a piece inspired by the gothic rock band, The Cure; and 5) by creating pieces that allude in a more "nebulous" way to the idea of the gothic, such as The Four Cocktail Rings of the Apocalypse, which is featured in these pages. The set includes one ring for each of the Horsemen: Death (the green horse), Famine (the black horse), Conquest or Pestilence (the white horse), and War (the red horse). Each ring is distinctive in appearance, but all combine precious or semiprecious gemstones with metals representing the detritus of industrial civilization—found, corroded steel and iron, for example. Death (Thanatos) combines such metals with silver, cubic zirconia, green quartz, found camera lens, peridot, and glass enamel chips. Alexander's jewelry, primarily made for men, seeks inspiration in the Renaissance, which was, in his view, "the last time men could freely wear jewelry." Pestilence (the white horse) features the image of a human skull wearing a gold crown, thus alluding to what is perhaps the most ubiquitous form of contemporary gothic jewelry: the skull ring.

DAUVIT ALEXANDER, THE JUSTIFIED SINNER
The Four Cocktail Rings of the Apocalypse: Famine, 2010
found corroded steel from abandoned table leg, silver, black tourmaline, black CZ, black onyx
2 x 1 ⅛ x 1 ⅛"
PHOTO: NEILSON PHOTOGRAPHY

DAUVIT ALEXANDER, THE JUSTIFIED SINNER
The Four Cocktail Rings of the Apocalypse: Death, 2010
found corroded steel box girder, silver, CZ, green quartz, found camera lens, peridot, glass enamel chips
1 ¾ x 1 ½ x 1 ¼"
PHOTO: NEILSON PHOTOGRAPHY

DAUVIT ALEXANDER, THE JUSTIFIED SINNER
The Four Cocktail Rings of the Apocalypse: War, 2010
found corroded steel electrical conduit, silver, garnets
2 ½ x 1 x 1"
PHOTO: NEILSON PHOTOGRAPHY

DAUVIT ALEXANDER, THE JUSTIFIED SINNER
The Four Cocktail Rings of the Apocalypse: Pestilence, 2010
Found, corroded iron gas pipe, silver, porcelain and gold cameo (by Lisa Stevens), quartzite, white CZ
1 ½ x 1 ¼ x 1 ¾"
PHOTO: NEILSON PHOTOGRAPHY

LOREE RODKIN
Skull Ring, 2012
18k white gold, white diamonds, black diamonds
1 x 1 ¼"
PHOTO: JOHNA HERNANDEZ

LOREE RODKIN
Bondage Ring, 2011
18k white gold, black rhodium, brown diamonds
1 x 2 ⅜"
PHOTO: JOHNA HERNANDEZ

DELFINA DELETTREZ
Skulls and Black Diamond (ring), from "Memento Mori" series
gold, black and white diamonds

DELFINA DELETTREZ
Four Snakes and Skull (ring), from "Memento Mori" series
gold, tsavorites, enamel

SKULL RINGS ARE without doubt the most popular type of gothic jewelry for men (although they are also worn by women), and are produced today at every price point, from the costly historical replicas created by the Italian fine jewelry company Codognato to mass-produced skull rings for goth kids.

The Los Angeles–based jewelry designer Loree Rodkin is famous for her skull rings, which are designed to give a rock-and-roll or heavy-metal edge to a medieval theme. She has many Hollywood clients, including Cher, Madonna, and Elton John. Rodkin is also known for jointed armor-like rings, another popular unisex style. (She is perhaps most famous for having designed Michelle Obama's Inaugural jewelry, which is now in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution; it is decidedly not gothic.)

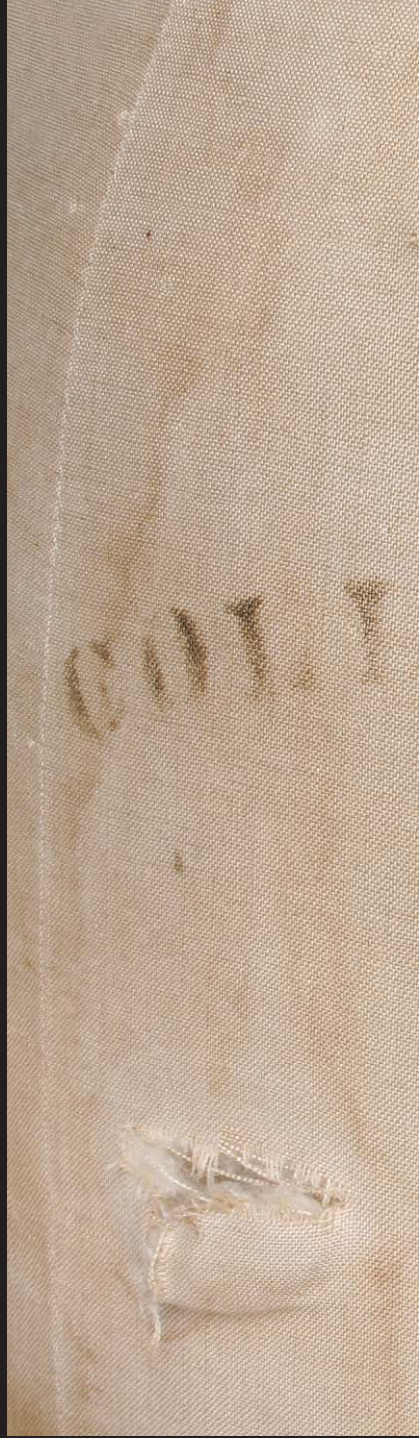
Another virtuoso of the skull ring is Delfina Delettrez, who was born in Rome, where her great-grandparents Edoardo and Adele founded the Italian luxury fashion company, Fendi in 1925. Her mother is the creative director for accessories at Fendi and her father is a jeweler. Delettrez interned at Chanel's style office for haute couture before presenting her first collection of jewelry in 2007 at the fashion boutique Colette in Paris. Influenced by surrealism and esotericism, her jewelry often takes the form of skulls, skeletons, eyes, and spiders. Featured here is one of her elaborate skull rings, with the skull wreathed in snakes. Her *King of Pop* brooch, depicting the head and torso of a skeleton wearing a flamboyant military jacket with gold epaulets, looks like something Michael Jackson might have worn.

DELFINA DELETTREZ
King of Pop (brooch),
from "Memento Mori" series
gold, silver, enamel, marble

Taxidermy & Transience

Memento mori; remember, you must die. An object, such as a skull, is considered a memento mori because it reminds us that life is transitory. With that sobering thought in mind, certain goth-inspired artists create facsimiles of skulls or skeletons in precious materials. (Damien Hirst famously covered a platinum cast of a human skull in diamonds, calling it *For the Love of God*.) Others take a different approach to the material body. Religious relics—including actual body parts, bones of saints, sacred blood—were venerated during the medieval period, and have also had a profound influence on the work of certain artist-jewelers, who incorporate bone, dead animals, hair, skin, and blood into their work. But by the late twentieth century, as artists looked back on the past, it was no longer just the medieval period that seemed bizarrely different, but also the Victorian era, with its cult of mourning, decadent poetry, and fondness for taxidermy.

JULIA DEVILLE
Bird Claw Brooch, 2007
gold
3 ⅛ x 1 ¾ x ¾"
PHOTO: TERENCE BOGUE



JULIA DEVILLE
Mechanical Wing Brooch, 2007
sterling silver, kingfisher wing
6 ⅝ x 4 ¾ x ¾"
PHOTO: TERENCE BOGUE

SIMON COSTIN
Memento Mori (neckpiece), 1986
Victorian lace, jet beads, vintage paste stones, rabbit skulls, Indian wooden black beads,condor talons, hematite cabochon stones
PHOTO: SIMON BROWN

Between 1984 and 1990, Simon Costin created some striking examples of gothic jewelry, in which he incorporated human hair and bones, animal teeth, claws, talons, beetle wings, fish skin, feathers, human sperm, blood, baroque pearls, and precious and semiprecious stones. His powerful *Memento Mori* necklace is now in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. Citing the poet Charles Baudelaire's belief that "reality... is found only in dreams," Costin explains, "It was this dream state that I drew on when I started to create jewelry." Costin was deeply influenced by the writing of Poe, which, he felt, dealt with "all the key Gothic themes... death, madness, and decay... decadent and dying aristocrats, disease, the supernatural, revenge, melancholic mansions sinking into gloomy swamps, incest and insanity, murder and the metonymy of gloom and horror. Perfect!" He was also inspired by European decadent writers and artists and imagines his jewelry "being worn by one of [the Symbolist artist] Franz Stuck's steely *femmes fatales*." Even the boxes Costin makes to house his pieces often have lines from his favorite poets scrawled across the lid.

Julia deVille is also fascinated by the concept of the *memento mori* and by "the methods the Victorians used to sentimentalize death with adornment." She works not only in traditional gold and silversmithing techniques, and with materials such as human hair, but also, most importantly, with taxidermy."I consider my taxidermy to be a celebration of life, a preservation of something beautiful," writes deVille. "To accentuate this point, I use only animals that have died of natural causes." Featured here is her *Mechanical Wing Brooch*, which is Victorian in its aesthetic sensibility, and reminds us not only of the aerial symbolism of birds and wings, but also of the horrific number of birds slaughtered to create nineteenth-century fashion accessories. Her *Gunclub Brooch* consists of a carved jet shield on which is mounted the head and forebody of a dead mouse with diamond eyes. The ironic inscription on the back reads "Prey for me always."

JULIA DEVILLE
Gunclub Brooch, 2004
mouse, diamonds, jet, gold
1 3/8 x 1 x 1 1/4"
PHOTO: GREG HARRIS

JENNIFER TRASK
Quizzing Glass, 1997
silver, blood, Corian, silk
pendant 4 x 2 ¼ x ¾"

Embodiment: Blood & Bones

JENNIFER TRASK FREQUENTLY interrogates the concept of "embodiment," both in terms of "physical sensation and emotional sentiment." *Quizzing Glass,* a necklace with a circular pendant partially filled with blood, is one of her most striking works. It is controversial for contemporary artists to use real blood in their work, and its significance in this particular piece is ambiguous, as is the title "Quizzing Glass," an antiquated expression for a monocle, itself now an obsolete accessory. However, blood is a powerfully symbolic aspect of the material body—closely associated with life and death—which Trask has used in other work, such as her *Poison Elixir Bracelet.*

Also obscurely sinister is her *Queen Anne's Lace* brooch, which refers to a flower that often has "a dark red spot in the center... that resembles a drop of blood, said to be from the Queen pricking her finger with her needle." Delicate in appearance, the object is constructed from steel sewing machine needles and python ribs. Bone, which Trask describes as "the absolute reductive essence of both life and death," is often employed in her work, both in the historical tradition of the macabre, *vanitas* still-life painting genre and as a way of addressing issues of beauty and nature, "in effect, a death of the real, the imperfect, the individual." Her *Germinate Neckpiece*, for example, which incorporates found and carved bone, antler, teeth, and pre-ban ivory, also incongruously appropriates floral motifs, as if to emphasize the transience of life.

JENNIFER TRASK
Queen Anne's Lace (brooch), 2010
steel sewing needles, python ribs, rubies, resin
7 ½ x 3 ½ x 2 ½"
Collection Jeannine Falino
PHOTO: JENNIFER TRASK

JENNIFER TRASK
Germinate (necklace), 2010
mule deer antlers, cow and ox bones, nutria teeth, pigeon skull (all found or repurposed), pre-ban ivory, plastic, steel, brass, recycled diamonds
approx. 22 x 14"
Collection Susan Beech
PHOTO: JENNIFER TRASK

Pain & Loss

MOURNING JEWELRY HAS a long history, involving mementos of the deceased worn on the body of the bereaved. Historical examples include hair jewelry, sometimes embellished with pearls, representing tears, and jewelry made of matte black materials, such as jet. The widowed Queen Victoria helped launch a veritable cult of mourning in the later nineteenth century, and Victorian mourning work has had a profound impact on many contemporary artists, whose work often includes references to the idea of pain and loss, both physical and emotional.

For Francis Willemstijn, an artist based in the Netherlands, works such as the *Widow* bracelet and *Hair* necklace "bear the traces of the past" and make a "connection between death and life." Certainly, hair is an especially rich material symbolically, because it is a part of the body that may be cut and will grow again, thus alluding to the idea of rebirth.

Lorena Lazard's *Between Darkness and Light* is a constructed brooch incorporating an orthopedic screw made of titanium that was removed from her mother's elbow after a surgical procedure. "The object represented pain and fear," she says, "and I felt the need to transform it into a piece of protection and strength." At the center of the brooch is a piece of red coral that resembles a heart, flanked by two wing-like forms in gold and silver. Lazard uses the heart as a source of imagery because it "embraces the whole of existence, life and death, presence and absence, love and hate, good and evil, happiness and sadness, passion and despair, faith and disbelief."

FRANCIS WILLEMSTIJN
Widow (bracelet), 2005
silver, cotton
3 ½ x 7 x ¾"
PHOTO: FRANCIS WILLEMSTIJN

FRANCIS WILLEMSTIJN
Gone with the Wind (necklace), 2009
human hair, jet, glass, silver, textile
diameter 8 5/8"
Collection Zuiderzee Museum,
Enkhuizen, NL
PHOTO: FRANCIS WILLEMSTIJN

Andi Harriman, a student at the Savannah College of Art and Design, describes herself as "a fan of the 'original' goth subculture," whose work is often related to the "*memento mori*, mourning, and the sentimental object." Her *Excavation VII* bracelet incorporates an animal sternum encased in epoxy putty, which mimics the look of disintegrating tendons revealing "bones—a memento of what once existed."

The pain of loss can also result in anger. "My work speaks to the... death of values in our culture," writes Chelsey Hammersmith. Growing up in Toledo, Ohio, she was profoundly affected by the decline of the auto industry, as was her entire family. Much of her work uses acrylic and addresses "the arbitrary value of any material," but the piece shown here, *Finger Armour*, is an articulated ring made of metal, which she also refers to as *Pretty Bird*. It expresses her anger at a former lover who rejected her because of her race and religion.

CHELSEY HAMMERSMITH
Finger Armour, 2011
copper, rhodium, trillion cut emerald
3 ¾ x 1 x 1"
PHOTO: KEITH MEISER

LORENA LAZARD
Between Light and Darkness
(brooch), 2002
sterling silver, 14k gold,
titanium screw, coral
3 ⅛ x 1 ½ x ⅜"
PHOTO: PAOLO GORI

ANDI HARRIMAN
Excavation VII (bracelet), 2011
sternums, epoxy putty, copper
3 x 5 x 13"
PHOTO: ANDREW BRODHEAD

Reliquaries & Cabinets of Curiosity

MEDIEVAL RELIQUARIES AND Renaissance cabinets of curiosity (*Wunderkammers*) are intriguing, in part because they contain strange and wonderful—and sometimes bizarre and horrifying—objects, both natural and artificial. But it is not simply that they are containers filled with treasures; they are also precious objects in and of themselves.

After traveling to northern Europe to research reliquaries, Lynn Cool created *Origin: radiant/evidence*, a tripartite piece consisting of two wearable components: a silver and copper neckpiece of twigs (*radiant)*, and a pendant (*evidence)*, which includes pearls, teeth, and recycled wedding rings as relics. The wearable pieces are combined with a tree-like stand to make a sculpture, which, Cool says, is affiliated with historical reliquaries "through its embedded subtext that expresses preciousness through commemoration." Her pendant *Memento* also explores "ideas of preciousness, memory, and transiency," drawing on a mixture of historical sources, from Victorian jet mourning jewelry to triadic forms known in the Gothic period as "serpents' tongues," which added mystery to the reliquary format.

LYNN COOL
Origin: radiant/evidence, 2010
copper, sterling silver, teeth, pearls, 14k gold recycled wedding rings, pearls, lenses, patina, two wearable jewelry components in situ
20 x 23 x 18"
PHOTO: AARON PADEN

LYNN COOL
Memento, 2012
sterling silver, plastic, pearls,
fossilized shark's tooth
4 x 2 ¾ x ½"
PHOTO: AARON PADEN

The Cabinet of Curiosities pendant is the work of Jack and Elizabeth Gualtieri, the husband and wife team known as Zaffiro. Classically trained goldsmiths who specialize in granulation, the Gualtieris were inspired to create this work by the drawings of the eighteenth-century naturalist Albertus Seba. During the Renaissance and for several centuries thereafter, cabinets of curiosity often contained precious objects incorporating branch coral. Coral, of course, is the remains of an aquatic animal, now endangered. (Elizabeth Gualtieri informed me that this particular piece was purchased in 2007 and was "harvested after the ban on dredging but before the CITES or GFCM recommendations.") The coral is here embellished with a variety of stylized insect, spider, and snake body parts.

ELIZABETH AND JACK GUALTIERI, ZAFFIRO
Cabinet of Curiosities, 2009
Sardinian branch coral, diamonds, 22k and 18k yellow gold
4 ½ x 2 ¼ x ¾"
PHOTO: DANIEL VANROSSEN

MARTA MATTSSON
Fear of Eels (necklace), 2008
eels, fishing hook, rose quartz
23 5/8 x 15 3/4"
PHOTO: ANNA LARSSON

Marta Mattsson has also been inspired by cabinets of curiosity, and she often uses "dead creatures... to evoke wonder." Her *Brown Beetle* brooch, for example, combines the precious and the disquieting, consisting as it does of the body of an electroformed beetle sliced open to reveal a glittering mass of cubic zirconias. "Sometimes I see beauty in things that other people find strange or are even repulsed by," says Mattsson, whose jewelry, "deals with the tension that lies between attraction and repulsion."

Part of Mattsson's aesthetic strategy involves using "seemingly inappropriate materials," which make ordinary objects look unfamiliar. Skin, like hair, is a peculiarly uncanny body part. Mattsson's *Remember Me* brooch or *Skin Bow* is made of calfskin, but it resembles human skin, twisted and delicately cut into the form of a lace bow. The luxury of handmade lace has played an important role in fashion, but there is something abject about this piece, which recalls the practice of so-called "delicate cutting," a common type of self-mutilation. Her *Fear of Eels* necklace, documented in a photograph, is made of real eels and was created for a project, "Wear Your Fear." Mattsson is the person in the photograph wearing the eels.

MARTA MATTSSON
Brown Beetle (brooch), 2011
electroformed beetle, cubic zirconias, lacquer, silver
1 1/4 x 2 x 1 1/2"
PHOTO: MARTA MATTSSON

MARTA MATTSSON
Remember Me (brooch), 2010
calfskin, silver
5 ⅛ x 4 ¾ x 1 ⅛"
PHOTO: MARTA MATTSSON

DEBRA DOWDEN-CROCKETT
She is...A little bit dangerous, 2011
glass, steel
22 x 5 x 2"
PHOTO: DEBRA DOWDEN-CROCKETT

Weaponized Women

She is... A little bit dangerous, a necklace made of hand-sculpted glass and steel, is part of the series "She is..." by Deborah Dowden-Crockett. Each of the 23 pieces of individually hand-sculpted glass is inspired by the shape of a dagger. According to the artist, this work "offers a glimpse into the darker and more complex dimensions of a woman's personality. The dark red glass used is an essential element of the message of power, strength, and potential danger conveyed." To my eye, the process of creation has modified the dagger shape into something vaguely biomorphic, not unlike the weirdly artificial-looking flowers evoked in Joris Karl Huysman's notoriously decadent fin-de-siècle novel *Against Nature*. But this only makes it even more effective as a necklace suitable for a *femme fatale*.

Loves Lies Bleeding by Madelyn Smoak is a necklace incorporating a vintage straight razor, which appears to be dripping with blood. "My work is informed by the high drama and trauma of my Southern Gothic childhood," says Smoak. Her art frequently incorporates found objects, like this one, "an artifact from a vanished age," whose original owner is long dead. The "challenge of turning a... dangerous item into something that is wearable" inspired her to begin making a series of necklaces, of which this is the first.

MADELYN SMOAK
Love Lies Bleeding (neckpiece), 2009
antique straight razor, fine silver, etched copper, jewelers' resin, Czech crystals, garnet, found chain
length 24" (excluding razor blade)
PHOTO: SETH TICE-LEWIS

Death & Desire

Joji Kojima is a young Japanese artist born in California, who studied graphic design at Tama Art University before turning to the creation of jewelry and fashion accessories, especially masks and rings. Lady Gaga wore his chain-mail mask on the cover of her "Fame Monster" album. When visiting his studio in Tokyo, his originality is immediately apparent. The macabre is a part of his work, but he treats subjects, such as skulls, very differently than most jewelers. His suspended skull ring, for example, gracefully positions the emblem of mortality several inches above the wearer's finger. In the chic-and-cruel spirit of Shaun Leane's armored jewelry, Kojima has also designed a series of weapon-like, articulated metal rings and a diamond-studded knuckleduster. But, perhaps, most striking are Kojima's masks.

Masks, veils, and disguises are a ubiquitous feature of gothic literature. Masking is also crucial to fashion, since in its artificiality, fashion ultimately represents the impossibility of *not* wearing a mask. As the nineteenth-century decadent writer Barbey d'Aurevilly put it in his essay on dandyism: "These Stoics of the boudoir drink their own blood under their mask and remain masked. For Dandies, as for women, to seem [to appear] is to be." Kojima's skull mask, with its articulated lower jaw, certainly evokes the *vanitas* theme of the skull beneath the skin. But his most extraordinary mask is baroquely fetishistic, heavily-bejeweled, spiked and barred, and rendered in tones of red and gold. Strikingly original in conception and impeccably crafted, it combines the macabre and the glamorous to devastating effect.

JOJI KOJIMA
Madam Skull, 2010
epoxy resin, stainless steel
8 5⁄8 x 7 x 4 3⁄4"
PHOTO: JOJI KOJIMA

JOJI KOJIMA
Raspberry, 2011
epoxy resin, brass, crystal
3 3⁄4 x 7 x 4 3⁄4"
PHOTO: JOJI KOJIMA

JOJI KOJIMA
Armadillo (ring), 2011
brass, gold plate
2 x 8 ½ x 1 ¼"
PHOTO: JOJI KOJIMA

LIN STANIONIS
Between Nature and Grace, 2006
18k gold, pate de verre, sterling silver
3 ¼ x 3 ¼ x ½"
PHOTO: JON BLUMB

The Mystery of Existence

AS WE HAVE seen, many natural forms—bones, thorns, snakes, skulls—carry powerful symbolic meanings. The artist Lin Stanionis combines and modifies them to emphasize the "shifting and unresolved nature of the symbols in the context of uncertain fate." According to Stanionis, "Almost all of these forms are either cast or modeled from plants and the remains of animals I collect outside my studio in rural Kansas." For example, in her work *Rapture,* she explores "the idea of death as the final release—there is fear (the rattlesnake head) and hope (the broken egg with the knotted rope) and inevitability (the clutch of tiny rattlesnakes hidden in the grass)." Similarly, *Between Nature and Grace*, which includes casts of bones and flowering plants, "originated from temptation and... the anxiety caused by desire." Here, she suggests, is "that luminal moment... where one is straddling the plane of transformation."

Stanionis views such works as gothic because they evoke "the notion of the sublime, the mystery of existence, and the accompanying sense of awe and fear." In addition, she says her "ornamentation is in some ways Gothic, since the "symbols and the ornament are one and the same, it is a dense ornament, one that is primal and speaks on an emotional level." Gothic work, Stanionis suggests, has a "dual emotional quality of fear and attraction; it is "a pleasure to the eye but fused with a sinister undertone." It "engages the imagination" at the site where "visual pleasure is offset by what is dark, uncertain, and confused."

So here is gothic jewelry in all its sinister beauty and mystery—contemporary works that transform fear and desire into living art.

LIN STANIONIS
Rapture, 2010
cast urethane resin, 18k gold
4 x 3 x ½"
PHOTO: JON BLUMB

Valerie Steele *is director and chief curator of The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. The author of more than a dozen books, including* The Corset *and* Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Culture, *she is also the founder and editor-in-chief of* Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture.

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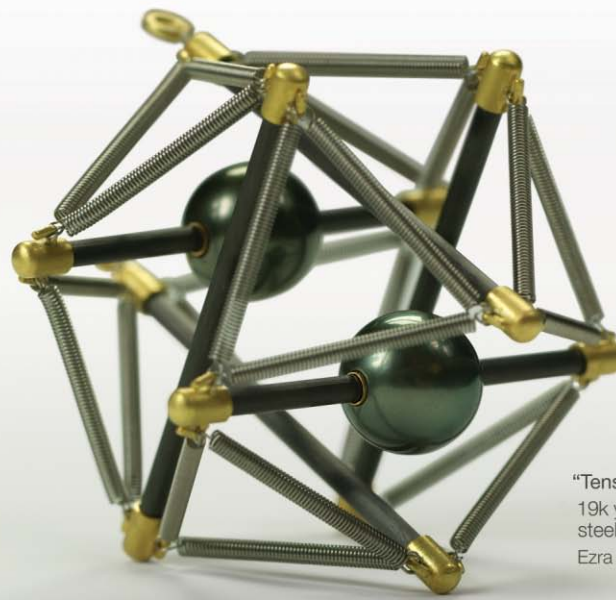

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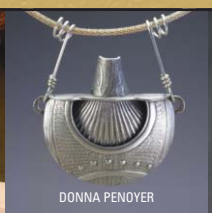
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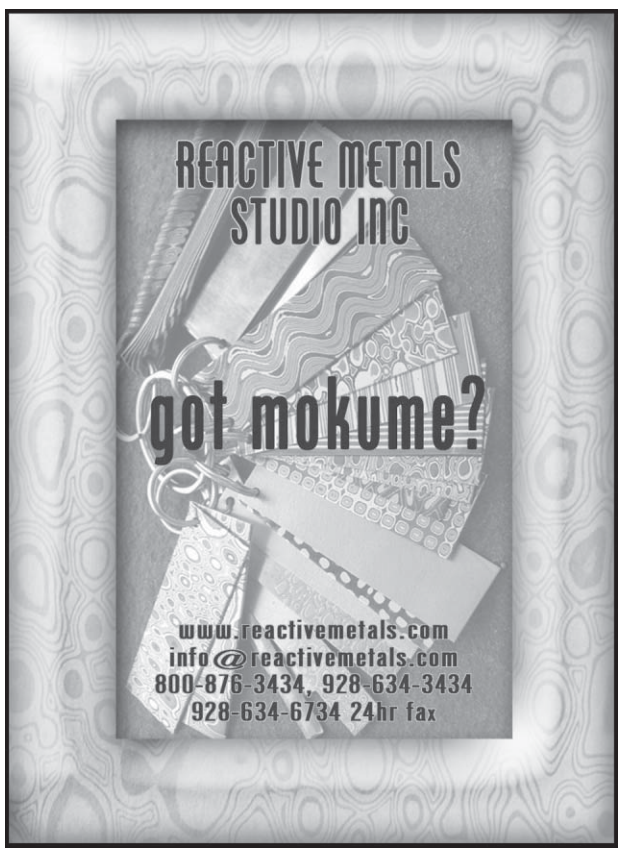

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FROM THE PAGES OF *MJSA JOURNAL*

Five Tips for Making Your Jewelry Photos Work for You

Editor's Note: *To have the most impact with the media and the public, your jewelry photos need to capture the essence of your work and convey a consistent, clear image. The following excerpt from the MJSA Journal series "Jewelry Photography," by Shannon L. Brown, will help you to ensure that, as designer Michael David Sturlin says, "you don't just photograph your work; you have your photographs work for you."*

RINGS BY CHRIS PLOOF

Be consistent. The nature of design—and the mindset of many designers—is to complete one idea and move on. Cindy Edelstein, president of the Jeweler's Resource Bureau in Pelham Manor, New York, says that isn't the way to go with the images you use for promotion. "The hard part for designers is that they think they have to keep changing," she says. "In marketing, consistency is number one. I always have to advise designers to stick with a concept for six months to a year."

Marlene Richey, a jewelry industry consultant in Boston and the author of the MJSA Press book *Profiting by Design*, suggests that designers focus on one photo that shows the highlight of a collection. "Use [it] on everything from a news release to an ad," she says. "Continue using that same photo so people become familiar with the piece, sometimes to the point of asking to see it at a show."

Give good art direction. Be sure to tell the photographer the intended use for the images. "With advertising, you may be able to take more liberties with the creative direction," says photographer Robert Diamante, while "all editorial and jury images should showcase the piece without distraction."

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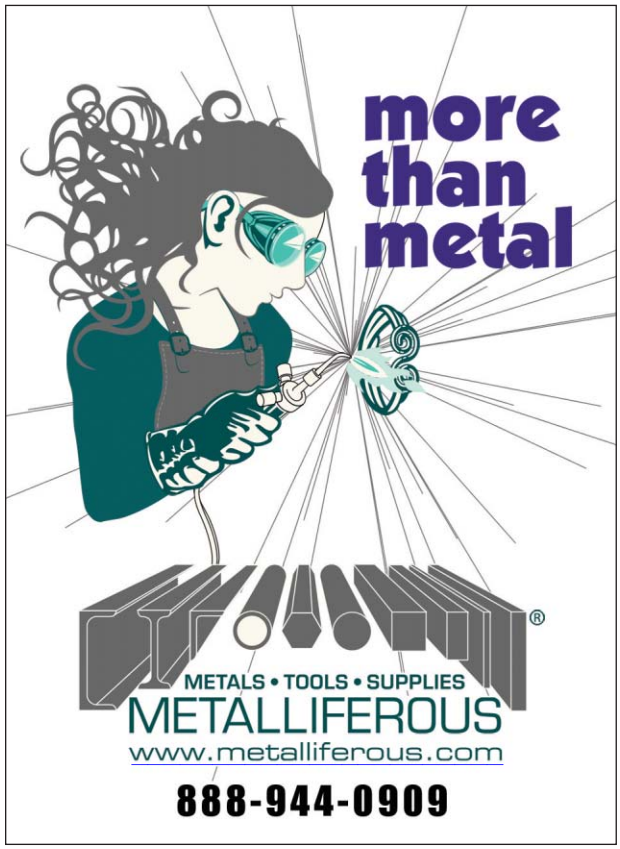

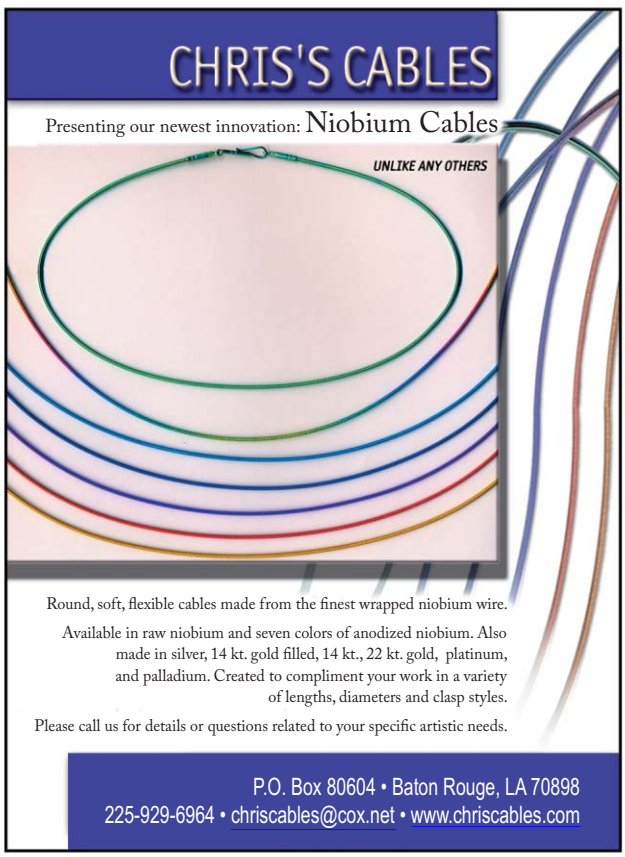
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